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ABSTRACT

A month-long study examined students' attitudes toward aspects of a specific reading workshop based on the whole language theory of instruction. Of the 23 students in a fifth-grade classroom, 11 became part of the experimental group who participated in the process which incorporated four primary aspects of language arts: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Students in the control group read only during the same time period. A Likert-type survey was administered to the experimental and control groups as pre- and posttests. In addition, qualitative interviews with the experimental group were conducted following the intervention. Results indicated that students: (1) preferred to select their own reading materials and did not think they spent too much time reading in school; (2) attitudes toward written teacher feedback and writing about books improved; and (3) found reading and discussions to be important aspects of a language arts program and would follow the existing language arts instruction process fairly closely with some modifications. Time and small sample limitations make the results ungeneralizable. However, the variety of responses and student attitudes shows that teachers will need to incorporate diversity into language arts programs to meet the needs of students with differing interests. (Contains 33 references and 6 figures of data. Appendixes present daily schedules, rules for reading, results of a demographic survey, the attitude survey, interview questions, a reading survey, the schedule of mini-lessons, student introductory letters and samples, and a comparison of the two groups.) (RS)

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Student Attitudes Regarding a Reading Workshop: The Effects of the Process

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Abstract

This month-long study examined students' attitudes toward aspects of a specific reading workshop, based on the whole language theory of instruction. Of the 23 students in a fifth grade classroom, 11 became part of the experimental group who participated in the process which incorporated four primary aspects of language arts: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Students in the control group read only during the same time period. A Likert-type survey, used to determine attitude toward various aspects of language arts, was written by researchers and administered to the experimental and control groups as pre- and post-tests. In addition, qualitative interviews with the experimental group were conducted following the intervention. Results indicated that students: (1) prefer to select their own reading materials and (2) do not think they spend too much time reading in school. In addition, results showed that students' attitudes toward written teacher feedback and writing about books improved. Interview results indicated that students (1) find reading and student discussions to be important aspects of a language arts program, and (2) would follow the existing language arts instruction process fairly closely with some modifications. Time and small sample limitations of this study deem it ungeneralizable. However, the variety of responses and student attitudes shows that teachers will need to incorporate diversity into language arts programs to adequately meet the needs of students with differing interests.

Chapter I
The Problem

Overview

A concern among reading educators is that there is no agreed upon method for language arts (reading, writing, and oral communication) instruction in the United States today. Although research has been conducted and concepts applied to teaching practices, there is no conclusive evidence that one method, such as basals or whole language, is the best (McCallum, 1988; Goodman, 1989; Lovitt, 1990). Thus, language arts instruction practices and their results are as varied as are the classrooms. In order to best meet the needs of students with differing interests and abilities, a more uniform method of instruction needs to be implemented on a consistent basis so that its benefits and shortcomings can be assessed and the process can be modified accordingly (Lovitt, 1990). Therefore, researchers and teachers must ask how a theory of language arts instruction may be adopted or modified to meet individual students' needs most effectively.

Whole language theorists address this challenge and provide a possible solution; and yet, the problem persists because whole language is only a *theory* of education, not a procedure that can be readily applied to classroom practices (Altwerger, Edelsky, & Flores, 1987; Goodman, 1989; Lovitt, 1990). Goodman (1989) suggests that "the differences in whole language classrooms come about because teachers are not relying on gurus and experts to tell them what to do. They make their

own decisions and build their own implementations" (p. 208). In other words, whole language does not involve packaged programs, but relies on teachers to discover what works best for them while following general whole language concepts.

McCallum (1988) found that because teachers often do not have the time nor the energy to design their own language arts programs around a theory like whole language, a prescribed program is more attractive and convenient. Flood and Lapp (1986), found that an "estimated 98%" of teachers across the states continued to use the basal approach, which is a packaged program that translates directly into classroom instruction (in McCallum, 1988, p. 201). Yet, the basal approach has been criticized by whole-language theorists as outdated and insensitive to individual students' needs (Lovitt, 1990). As a result, various approaches have emerged in response to changing demands in society and have been adopted by teachers concerned with individuals as well as with the overall functioning of their classrooms (McCracken and McCracken, 1972; Blackburn, 1984; Atwell, 1987; Atwell, 1990). This study examines students' attitudes toward the components of one such approach, implemented by Atwell (1987), which is based on whole language theory.

Choice, a component of the Atwell approach, is an important distinction between the whole-language perspective and the basal program approach. Whole language theory implies that students should be allowed to select their own reading materials, within certain bounds. In contrast, the basal approach, a prescribed method of teaching, asserts

that the teacher and textbook editors should make the choices (McCallum, 1988). And yet, whole-language proponents posit that students' attitudes toward reading are improved when they are permitted to select their own materials (Atwell, 1987; Lowe, Wood, & Algozzine, 1992; Sakrison, 1993). From that evidence, one might conclude that teachers should adhere to a whole-language philosophy. However, student selection of reading materials is only one part of the whole-language theory of instruction. Thus, the problem of maintaining consistency among teaching practices reemerges once students have chosen their books. In what ways should teachers guide students through the remaining elements of language arts, such as writing and communication?

In an attempt to respond to this question, Atwell (1987), a researcher and a teacher, has implemented a process that is consistent with the whole-language philosophy. The process has proven to affect students' attitudes in positive ways as well as improve language arts skills of pupils in Atwell's classroom. However, Goodman (1989) writes, "whole language teachers do not attribute the learning of their pupils to published programs, prescribed behaviors, and preset outcomes" (p. 209). In other words, Goodman (1989) would argue that Atwell's success with language arts instruction is derived from incorporating whole language theory into practice rather than from using the particular process outlined in her book (Atwell, 1987). Goodman and Atwell would agree that individualizing the process is more important than the process itself.

Purpose

Based on existing research, what is needed, then, is further research showing the most useful ways to modify existing practices to meet individual needs in the classroom. For instance, if a teacher desires to follow whole language theory, to what extent must he/she adhere to a process like the one implemented by Atwell? Although Atwell's landmark program has received much positive feedback from teachers using the workshop or modified versions of it (Atwell, 1990), more information is still needed from students participating in the process. The ensuing study examines middle school students' attitudes toward language arts instruction as a tool for evaluating the effectiveness of individual components of Atwell's process.

Hypothesis

Students will be able to identify portions of Atwell's process that they prefer or find most helpful in gaining a heightened interest in reading. It is also predicted that teachers will use this information to shape language arts instruction in their classrooms.

Chapter II
Literature Review

The need for this particular study is best explained by describing the progression from the theoretical construct of whole language to examples of how theory has been put into practice, to the importance of students' attitudes toward instruction. The result is a need to discover students' attitudes of a specific program that espouses the whole language theory.

The basis for this study rests on the assertion of Altwerger, Edelsky, & Flores (1987), who write, "it (whole language) must become practice but it is not the practice itself" (p. 145). In other words, as whole language theory becomes practice, teachers select aspects of existing programs or develop their own practices to be used in the classroom. Turner and Alexander (1980) synthesized research that posited that examining students' attitudes is important in the reading instruction selection process because students' attitudes are directly related to their desire to learn (Robeck & Wilson, 1974; Alexander & Filler, 1976; Mathewson, 1976; Turner & Alexander, 1980). Therefore, asking students about aspects of a particular method could lead to a language arts program that is positively correlated to students' attitudes.

The first part of the progression involves a discussion of the underlying theory of whole language, a recent trend in language arts instruction, which was actually designed to permeate all subject areas. In a synthesis of whole language literature, Lowe, Wood, & Algozzine

(1992) discovered an agreement among researchers in this field (Goodman, 1986; Jacobs, 1989; Lamme, 1989; Strickland & Morrow, 1989; Wagner, 1989) as they identified six major components of a whole language classroom: "(a) teachers model reading and writing by reading aloud and telling stories to students; (b) children choose some of their own reading and writing topics and varied reading materials are present in classroom libraries; (c) learning centers, directions and materials are labeled to make classrooms engaging places to learn; (d) daily uninterrupted reading time is scheduled; (e) children have opportunities to write and share in small groups; and (f) the curriculum is integrated through the use of thematic units" (Lowe et. al, 1992, p.15). For a classroom teacher to espouse whole language, he/she must combine all the components by developing instructional practices to address them. Current research (Goodman, 1986; Jacobs, 1989; Lamme, 1989; Strickland & Morrow, 1989; Wagner, 1989) indicates that teachers should consult a wide variety of resources and utilize personal creativity because all-in-one textbooks are not used as the primary source of learning.

This study asks, what program or parts of an established method do students prefer, in an attempt to build the bridge between whole language theory and classroom practice? Altwerger et. al (1987) suggest that "whole language teachers. . . deliberately tie practice and theory" (p. 149). Thus, as teachers select instructional practices from myriad alternatives, are some methods more likely to positively affect students' attitudes than others?

Closer examination of practical applications of the whole language theory by various teachers and researchers will help to focus this particular study. First, the theory states that teachers must model the questions students should ask themselves when reading and writing (Lowe et al, 1992). Villaume and Worden (1993) contend that "the essence of whole language" involves teachers helping students develop "literate voices" (p. 462). In their study of fourth graders, they instituted "classroom talk", in which students engage in dialogues with the teacher and one another and soon learn to internalize that process as they read and write for themselves (Villaume and Worden, 1993, p. 463). They posit that readers will involve themselves according to experiences, so whole language teachers must model the experiences that will encourage students to use their literate voices (p. 462).

The second criteria for a whole-language classroom, mentioned above, is that children should have a choice of reading materials (Lowe et al, 1992). Sakrison (1993) found that student-selected reading was the "basic foundation of whole-language philosophy" when he observed a sixth grader, Lori, become much more prolific as she chose her own books. Although Sakrison was unable to identify a predictable pattern in her selections, he did find that Lori consistently selected material that interested her. This author identifies the program as "literature-based" and comments on silent reading time and book chats, but does not specify other methods used to get students more interested in reading (p. 3).

A third component of whole language classrooms is that they have

easily accessible reading materials and should be engaging places to learn (Lowe et. al, 1992). Clary (1991) cites Livaudais (1985), who found that adolescents "will read more when books are physically close to them" (p.340). Similarly, research by Gold, Greengrass, & Kulleseid (1992) involved a collaboration between librarians and classroom teachers to facilitate whole-language learning by expanding the number of available resources. In this program, students selected their reading materials from the classroom and school libraries, were given several uninterrupted reading periods each week, and conferenced with teachers about their books (p. 536). In addition, students evaluated new literature and, consequently, "most of the children have very positive attitudes about reading" (Gold et. al, 1992, p. 537). The result of this effort was a sharing of "knowledge and enthusiasm with a community of readers of all ages" (p.537). Fostering this kind of open communication between the classroom and the library may alleviate a teacher's concern of limited materials.

A fourth component of the whole language theory is that daily uninterrupted reading time is scheduled (Lowe et al, 1992). Clary (1991) identifies several names for this time, including USSR (Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading), or the similar SSR, DEAR (Drop Everything and Read) or SQUIRT (Sustained Quiet Reading Time). These segments are commonly scheduled for, but not restricted to, 15 minutes in length. Clary (1991) states that, "devoting prime class time this way for students to read without excessive constraints and demands becomes a very strong motivator, especially when coupled with the teacher's reading

aloud" (pp. 343-344). McCracken and McCracken (1972) found that SSR was a "vital part" of their reading program and "it is something every child should do every day" (p.151).

Another important aspect of the whole language philosophy, according to Lowe et al. (1992), is that children have opportunities to write and share in small groups. This assertion is open to interpretation in terms of what forms the writing and sharing will take, but the researchers suggest that "daily and response journals allow an interaction between student and teacher" and that these allow "the teacher to evaluate writing and comprehension skills" (Lowe et. al, 1992, p.17). Atwell (1987) describes mini-lessons, often student-run, in which students and the teacher share information about literature. Similarly, Altwerger et al. (1987) indicated that since language arts involves all forms of communication--reading, writing, listening, speaking--instruction must incorporate all the forms to be considered whole language (p. 145).

Finally, whole language teachers use thematic units as instructional tools (Lowe et al, 1992). For students, this may mean applying language arts skills to all the content areas. For instance, Thompson (in Atwell, 1990) has her students use journals to respond to their feelings about math. Thompson adapted Atwell's procedure for reading workshop (see Appendix A) and found that students wrote frequently because they enjoyed having an opportunity to discuss math in a way typically reserved for language arts.

Prior to the emergence of the whole language theory, classroom practices did exist that applied similar concepts for language arts

instruction. One such program, entitled RIOTT (Reading Is Only the Tiger's Tail), encouraged individualization and the integration of all language arts components, especially thinking and communicating (McCracken & McCracken, 1972). RIOTT incorporated the sharing of journal writing, record keeping, and SSR. Teachers using this program were advised to respond to at least every third journal entry and have active class discussions to address students' ideas. Teachers were also encouraged to read aloud to students as well as read themselves during SSR in order to stress the importance of reading.

A criticism of approaches like RIOTT has been that students may not be obtaining the necessary skills to perform on standardized tests. RIOTT program creators, McCracken & McCracken (1972), argue that the advantage of RIOTT is in measuring students' reading growth overall, rather than examining a specific score compared to "some normative average" (p.206). In order to respond to normative demands, the authors suggested that, "the RIOTT program does not need to be imposed. . . small parts of it an be added to complement most programs" (p.190). Thus, further examination is still needed to understand which of the small parts of existing practices might be adapted and utilized from classroom to classroom.

Other researchers saw the value of such programs and adaptations to the traditional basal approach. Twenty-two years after the emergence of RIOTT, Blackburn (1984) recognized the close relationship between reading and writing. Although Blackburn supported that the connection between the two areas must be cultivated by the teacher, she

hypothesized that the children may be more committed to their reading and writing tasks if they are permitted to make their own choices. Therefore, the teacher acts as a facilitator. Students essentially author their own learning through an integrated reading/writing approach, which resembles principles of whole language theory.

From this evidence is borne a need to examine the critical features of a language arts instructional model to determine which portions of an established program teachers might use in their own classrooms. Although Goodman (1989), a leading researcher of whole language, does not support teachers' use of published programs, he promotes the use of other teachers' testimonials. Goodman (1989) states, "the proof is in their classrooms and their pupils" (p.213). In other words, teachers may examine what others have shown to be effective practices, modify them, and then apply them according to the particular needs of their students.

One such practice, that adheres to the principles of whole language, has been designed by Atwell (1987) and described in her book, *In the Middle*. Atwell's program resembles RIOTT in the following ways: Both incorporate all of the components of language arts through the use of journals, or logs, silent reading in class, active discussions about books, ideas, and a sharing of student work (1987).

Even before writing her book, Atwell (1984) posited that reading and writing go hand-in-hand. She contended that traditionally for junior high students there seemed to be only two ways to teach reading: "Either a skills/drills/basal textbook approach-essentially an extension of

elementary programs-or a watered-down 'lit crit' approach . . . pass out the anthologies, introduce the vocabulary, conduct a whole-class post mortem and sometimes assign an essay" (p.241). As Atwell began to analyze language arts instruction she found that "we read writing just as we write reading" (p.241). She wanted her students to understand the inextricable relationship between the two. A need for program adaptation led Atwell (1987) to design her own program for reading and writing. She found that the use of literature logs, student-selected reading materials, class discussions, documentation and conferencing, mini-lessons, and time in class for reading were effective components for a reading workshop.

Atwell (1987) contended that, "What I do in my classroom next year will not look exactly like the classroom I described here. New observations and insights will amend theory; the process by which I translate theory into action will change. The agents for change are my students" (p. 254).

As teachers make decisions about which parts of the practice to adapt or remove, it is helpful to note how some of these teachers varied Atwell's program to meet their own students' needs whereas others simply highlighted certain aspects of the reading workshop. Although research has indicated that Atwell's program has been effective as evidenced by a series of testimonials by teachers (Atwell, 1990), research of students' attitudes of her program may provide further insight into the effectiveness of particular practices.

Chard (in Atwell, 1990), a 4th grade teacher, found that learning

logs fostered a cooperative atmosphere between the teacher and students. The logs enabled the teacher to evaluate the effectiveness of lessons and provided a way to check student progress. Vaughan (in Atwell, 1990) found that in the logs, students "tested hypotheses, set goals, extended concepts to their own experiences, and applied and evaluated new information" (p.69). Vaughan advocated the use of double-entry journals in which the students connected new information with what they already knew. Pierpont (in Atwell, 1990), used Atwell's idea of a dialogue journal in which students wrote about feelings and impressions and the teacher responded with a comment or probing question; but, she also incorporated the use of literature logs. Pierpont said the "dialogue journals became an effective way for my students and me to share our feelings and thoughts about the books we read" (p.105). Maxim (in Atwell, 1990), a third grade teacher, filled her room with books for her students to explore and enjoy. The common thread connecting these teachers' approaches is that they have all experienced success from employing and adapting Atwell's reading workshop, and specifically, the literature logs.

In addition to the use of logs, book discussions, SSR, and student-selected reading materials, Atwell (1987) suggests that teachers need to document student progress. She requires that students follow guidelines during reading, summarized in Appendix B. In conjunction with her belief that reading and writing are interrelated processes, Atwell requires that students write at least one weekly letter analyzing what they've read, and exhibit growth over time. Atwell employs dialogue

journals and evaluation conferences to collect her data. Goodman (1989) supports this practice, "whole language teachers and administrators need to document what they and their pupils are doing" (p.219). Monitoring students' progress enables teachers to evaluate program effectiveness and quality of instruction.

Dionisio (1989), a teacher of 6th-8th grade remedial readers, explained that her students were not reading for comprehension because they were so consumed with decoding. She writes, "I adopted the practices of Atwell's reading workshop" (p. 33). She used mini-lessons to model good strategies and discovered that the students read much more than they had the previous year.

Wentworth (1990) applied Atwell's program in her 8th grade classroom. Once introduced, the students embraced the idea immediately; and she revealed that the students read, wrote, and learned more in the last two months of school than they had in the previous seven (p.74). Wentworth mentions one student, Cordele, who "was more than functionally illiterate; he was close to completely so" (p.75). After establishing the language workshop, Cordele "became both a writer and a reader" (p.76). Using writing and reading together has been found to reinforce both skills (Matalene, 1979). Matalene (1979) suggests that "for those of us who are asked to teach literature and composition together, the content of the reading process can become the subject matter of the writing process" (p. 8).

Others have modified Atwell's approach, like Hoetker (in Atwell, 1990), who found that the program neglected to have all students

reading the same piece of literature. Hoetker (in Atwell, 1990) contends that students don't always read with expression, and that literature needed to be a "social affair" (p. 77). She found that reading the same book together facilitated this social atmosphere. Atwell (1987) does compensate for this factor by including mini-lessons and teacher read-alouds during language arts.

Gilles (1989), a 7th grade teacher, emphasized using literature study groups as an important part of the instructional process. Gilles writes that, "students are given a choice of books to read; those reading the same book meet together with the teacher to discuss the book; students keep a literature log in which they respond to their reading" (p. 38). She also stresses student choice of reading materials, but says that it is important for teachers to encourage students to select quality materials. Gilles (1989) found that, "giving students class time to read their books demonstrates that we value reading" (p. 39). The variety of Gilles' assertions indicates that individual teachers may integrate many different components of established practices when teaching language arts.

Finally, a symposium held for teachers of reading revealed what they learned from using Atwell's method (Anderson, 1989). Seabrook (in Anderson, 1989) indicated that her mini-lessons weren't going as well as she would have liked. Therefore, rather than completely change her reading program, she simply allowed students to lead discussions about books that they liked. Frazier (in Anderson, 1989) wrote that, "the aspect of the course my students enjoyed the most was the free choice of topics"

(p. 49). He explained that this type of reading program made the students' writing more interesting.

Thus far, discussion has addressed the salient features of whole language theory and teacher testimonials of its practical applications. Researchers and teachers of whole language agree that applying the theory may lead to effective classroom practices. The final part of this progression from theory to practice discusses the importance of students' attitudes in making decisions about instruction and ultimately, interpreting them.

Turner and Alexander (1980) synthesized research which showed a positive correlation between students' attitudes and learning (Robeck & Wilson, 1974; Alexander & Filler, 1976; Mathewson, 1976). From studies of physiological aspects of learning, Robeck and Wilson (1974) concluded that "how a learner feels about the information being processed affects his learning and later utilization of that information" (in Turner and Alexander, 1980, p. 3). Alexander and Filler (1976) found that affect "provides the desire and will to read" (in Turner and Alexander, 1980, p. 2). Finally, Mathewson (1976) suggested two methods for positively affecting students' attitudes toward reading: "Creative reading" (p. 7) and using questioning that helps students gain understanding about their own feelings in reading (p.21). One overall conclusion from this research is that students' attitudes about their learning are important and consideration of these attitudes will lead to more effective classroom practices.

Brown (1991) conducted research with African American middle

school students to determine their attitudes toward the "Summer Step" reading program that integrated reading, writing, listening and speaking (p.9). The program incorporated: 1) using a Directed Reading Thinking Activity (DRTA) to hone reading comprehension skills; 2) giving students time to read self-selected materials daily; 3) reading to students daily; 4) having students write in journals, some of which involved process writing (eg. rough draft, editing); 5) allowing "students the opportunity to express their ideas orally"; and 6) incorporating music was used as a medium for teaching (p. 4-5). The results of the study showed significant improvements in students' attitudes toward reading, due to self-selected reading materials instead of specific requirements established by teachers. Thus, the importance of student choice of reading materials reemerges, but leaves the question of whether generalizations about the summer reading program could be applied to the regular classroom (p. 9). For purposes of this study, the persistent question is, besides choice, what specific practices based in whole language theory will lead to positive student attitudes?

Student testimonials, cited by Dionisio (1989), highlight and exemplify 6th-8th grade students' attitudes toward a reading workshop based on Atwell's research. Dionisio cites a student, "I never used to like reading. But I guess after you read a book you really like, another one has to come after it" (p. 36). Another student wrote, "And thanks alot you made me read and it made a difference in my life" (p.36-37). Teacher accounts of students' testimonials are revealing, however, addressing students directly may provide greater insight into specific parts of the

workshop that they believe to be most effective.

In conclusion, as teachers apply whole language theory to classroom practices, it is important to consider research supporting existing practices as well as to understand students' attitudes toward those practices. What follows is a study designed to closely examine students' opinions of parts of a specific process.

Chapter III
Design of the Study

Sample

The following study was conducted in an elementary school in the suburbs of a medium-sized city located in the central region of a mid-Atlantic state. From a total of 23 fifth grade students, with an almost equal number of girls and boys, 18 were Caucasian and five African-American. A randomly assigned sample group of six boys and five girls, two of whom were African American, was identified to participate in the study. Only three students in the class qualified for resource services due to learning disabilities. Reading ability levels of the sample group ranged from on grade level to several grades above, based on recent Iowa test scores and teacher observations.

Measures

Three separate surveys were developed in order to obtain information for research, as well as one survey developed solely for the intervention. (See Appendices C, D, E, and F)

First, a demographic survey (Appendix C) was designed to obtain general information about the participants of the study. This information was provided by the school principal and was used for description only.

Second, a Likert-type survey of 15 questions relating to attitudes toward the language arts instruction process, modeled after surveys by

Herrold (1987) and Levinski (1981), was presented to all 23 students both at the beginning and the end of the study (see Appendix D). The purpose of the survey was to obtain information for comparing the attitudes of students in the experimental group before and after participating in Atwell's reading workshop and also for comparing the sample group with the control group, who participated in a modified approach. The survey was designed to measure students' attitudes toward specific parts of the language arts instruction process, such as discussion with students and teacher, writing, general reading behaviors, and student choice of reading materials.

In addition to the whole-class survey, interviews with the expermental group of 11 students were conducted at the conclusion of the month-long study (see Appendix E). Patton (1990) describes the particular type of interview used as "standard open-ended" because it involves asking carefully worded questions that allow for a wide array of responses (p. 280). This type of interview is useful for obtaining systematic data in a short period of time. The purpose of the interviews was to obtain specific information about how students feel about the reading workshop process and what parts of the process they feel are most important. Students were asked two specific questions, with built-in probes for further clarification.

Finally, a reading survey was designed for and administered to the experimental group as part of the language arts instruction (see Appendix F). Information regarding preferred genres of study, favorite authors, and book selection strategies was used to conduct mini-lessons.

The purpose of the reading survey was also to give students a sense of ownership of the lessons taught.

Design of the Study

The reading workshop used in this study closely followed one developed by Atwell (1987) and was conducted four days each week for a month in a learning cottage adjacent to the school. First, the 45-minute workshop included a brief daily mini-lesson, during which time students engaged in discussions about literary genres, authors, reading strategies, characterization etc. Atwell (1987) suggests these topics and others for the mini-lessons, which were incorporated into my teaching, and have been included (see Appendix G). The first few mini-lessons were used for explaining the workshop, distributing a list of suggested books, and assisting students with book selection. Students were required to select books that were age and level appropriate, and were not permitted to read magazines or comic books.

Next, students were given at least 20 minutes for Sustained Silent Reading (SSR). Atwell (1987) describes specific rules to be followed for SSR, which have been summarized (see Appendix B). Students were permitted to sit anywhere in the learning cottage, but were required to sit where their reading could be monitored. Students were reminded of rules on occasion and were expected to follow them. During SSR, weekly individual conferences between each student and the researcher were conducted . The conferences were used for goal setting, book discussion, and student read-alouds.

In addition to mini-lessons and SSR, students were permitted to use the last five minutes of the workshop to write a letter to the researcher or to friends about the book they were reading. During the first week, students were provided with a letter describing the workshop as well as given sample letters to use as guides for their own letters (see Appendices H and I). Students were required to write at least one letter each week to the researcher in their dialogue journals that included feelings about books, characters, or questions, often prompted by the researcher or classmates. Responses to their comments and queries were prompt and, in accordance with Atwell's suggestions (1987), asked a specific question with each response.

Finally, students were asked to record books partially read and/or completed on a sheet provided by the researcher. The purpose of the records was twofold: students would know how many books they read and would also be able to monitor their own progress. Students in the control group were required to record their books as well.

Students not part of the experimental group were given 30 minutes of SSR daily by the regular classroom teacher and were also given occasional writing assignments based on a particular literary genre being studied at that time. A numerated comparison of the two programs is summarized (see Appendix J).

Analysis

Results from the pre- and post-tests were tabulated according to frequency of possible responses to each of the questions in the survey.

Frequencies were then converted to the percentage of students surveyed who agreed with the question being asked. Due to low numbers of participants and an effort to improve measurability and analysis of the data, varying levels of agreement (eg. strongly agree and agree) were combined in the statistics .

Qualitative data was collected, transcribed, and color-coded according to recurring themes, such as: choice, time, SSR, reading, emerging ideas, overall feeling about the process, and aspects of language arts instruction (eg. writing, discussion, teacher feedback). The frequencies of these themes were tabulated and synthesized in outline form. In addition, specific testimonials in support of the research hypothesis and/or existing research were highlighted.

Summary

The remaining chapters include a description of results from the survey administered before and after the intervention and possible explanations for the results. Data collected from the student interviews has been synthesized thematically with the survey results and will be discussed in greater detail.

Chapter IV
Analysis of Results

Results from the study are best summarized thematically by combining the quantitative and qualitative data. As hypothesized, students' attitudes revealed the need for modifications due to the variety, and sometimes inconclusive nature, of their responses. There appeared to be few distinctions between the experimental and control groups, which may be attributed to the brevity of the study and the general familiarity of both groups with the instructional practices adhering to whole language theory. In addition, the pre- and post-test data varied only slightly, with some decreasing agreement in certain areas.

Based on the diversity of students' attitudes toward specific components of language arts instruction, findings from this study suggest that as teachers plan instruction, they will need to consider modifications of existing programs and consult an array of sources. Results of this study imply several dominant aspects that students said they liked or found helpful or important, such as: choice of reading materials (with some guidance) and options for selecting books (implied by proximity question), student discussions, writing, time for reading in school, and incorporating an element of fun.

The component of the process students most emphatically found to be important was a preference for choice of reading materials, which received 100% agreement by both the experimental and control groups in the post-test (see Figure 1). Several questions on the survey relating

to choice indicated that students prefer to make their own selections and were less receptive to teacher suggestions. The notion of choice suggests that teachers establish individualized reading programs, because not all students like reading the same types of books, nor do they all read at the same level or rate. Moreover, teachers providing an array of options for discovering reading materials will facilitate choice as well as ensure the appropriateness of the selection.

"Student-selected" does not mean that students receive no guidance. Instead, teachers must establish criteria, such as level, school, and age-appropriate material. In fact, several students who were interviewed identified using peer recommendations and the five-finger rule, a strategy for determining book difficulty for the individual, as methods to aid in book selection. In addition, some students interviewed suggested that occasionally having groups reading the same book encouraged communication and provided an opportunity for presentations.

One student commented, "I liked having the choice of books we had and not having to read one book for the whole time. And not have the teacher tell us what to read." Other students stated that they would permit students to select their own books if they were planning their own instruction.

A similar issue, which some researchers found important for the enhanced success of reading programs, is the proximity of reading materials. However, in this study, most students indicated that they did not prefer to select books from the classroom library, despite the

convenience (see Figure 2). Instead, students who were interviewed revealed that they used a variety of resources when selecting books. For instance, nearly all students said that one of the most helpful ways to select books was from peer recommendations that occurred during discussion. One participant intimated that this type of discussion helped because students "don't have to go searching everywhere for a certain book." Although accessibility of reading materials is necessary to conduct a reading workshop in which students may select books, the exact location of the books does not seem to affect attitude. One student said, "I just got some books from home and I wanted to read 'em 'cause I never got a chance."

Another component of the process that was measured and deemed to be important by both groups from the pre- and post-tests was time for reading in school (see Figure 3). Survey results indicated that over 80% of all students believed they did not spend too much time reading in school. The statistic is supported by researchers, some of whom contended that allowing time for reading was the most important aspect of a language arts program (McCracken & McCracken, 1972; Sakrison, 1993). Qualitative data in this study yielded similar results: Most students interviewed said that they would like a longer reading period as well as more time for language arts in general. For instance, when asked about the most important part of the process, one student said, "definitely the reading, cause otherwise you wouldn't have anything to write or talk about." Enough time must be reserved during the school day for SSR, which allows students to focus on their books and have

sufficient information for conferencing or writing. Some students may prefer a longer time for SSR and are accustomed to doing so (as stated in several student interviews). Therefore, not only is it helpful to ask students which parts of the process they prefer, but it is important to ask them for suggestions about time allocation of various components of the workshop in order to maintain positive attitudes. In fact, several students indicated that they believed the entire workshop should be longer to have sufficient time for all the activities.

A third component of the process was discussion, which included weekly conferencing with the teacher and sharing that occurred among students during the mini-lessons. Surprisingly, students in the control group (who did not engage in discussions or conferences) indicated a higher preference (75-83%) for talking about their books in general, as opposed to 55% in the experimental group in both the pre- and post-tests (see Figure 4). Even so, positive attitudes of students in the experimental group toward talking to the teacher about books, or conferencing, improved by 18% between the pre- and post-tests and remained higher than the control group. Even though only 55% of the experimental group surveyed said they liked to talk about books they read, qualitative comments about discussion and conferencing revealed that all students found discussions to be very important or helpful. The discrepancy may be due to the vagueness of the survey question in terms of distinguishing between talking with peers or teachers.

Some of the comments about discussion related to the utility of peer recommendations and the opportunity to share ideas and talk! For

example, one student said the workshop, "made our ability to talk to people a little better 'cause we talked more." Another said, " I really liked the part about the conferencing with the teacher. . .I thought it just kind of helped me express my ideas more and it helped me learn things that I wouldn't have learned otherwise." In sum, students liked having the chance to talk, share, and receive oral feedback from the teacher. The teaching implication is that as teachers form language arts instruction, the nature of the discussions will need to be considered.

In addition to discussion, the experimental group showed a 27% increase in attitude toward writing about books, which may be a result of the increased opportunity to do so. Positive attitudes toward written teacher feedback in the survey as well as the interviews remained high at 82% (see Figure 5). The control group showed no significant change in positive attitude between the pre- and post-test with regards to writing in general, but was near or above 50% agreement overall. However, results from the post-test showed an increase in the percentage of students who were uncertain about their feelings toward written teacher feedback. Although it is difficult to account for the change in the control group, since no intervention occurred; perhaps the increase in "not sure" responses to this question shows that students were simply unaware of what the correspondence would involve.

Weekly correspondence, which was part of the reading workshop, was quite flexible in nature and gave students the opportunity to express themselves privately and in writing. Grammar and interpretations were not corrected, but students were encouraged to check for comprehension

or make associations between their books and themselves. One student said of letter writing, "I think it's helpful and fun and you work on your writing skills while you're at it." Including letters as an option for students to express themselves incorporates one of the main aspects of language arts instruction and also provides a different outlet for expression. One student suggested assigning a certain number of letters each month, rather than once a week, to allow for even greater flexibility and student responsibility. When asked about the workshop in general, another student commented, "you learn that every time you read something you don't just have to keep it to yourself--you can put it out in the open."

Finally, a series of questions on the survey were included to determine general feelings about reading. Results indicated that overall, students in both groups read every day and finish books that they begin to read (see Figure 6). There were no significant differences between the experimental and control groups, which ultimately contributes to the validity of the sample as a community of readers. Interviews revealed that students found reading to be the most important aspect of the reading workshop. One student said he would prefer not writing letters because he believed it interfered with his reading time. Another student offered a solution to this concern by making language arts a longer part of the entire school day. Some of the comments included: "I like the reading the best because it let me catch up on some of my reading my books" and "I think the reading was most important because it got kids to have their own time to read whatever they like," which not only advocates reading, but choice.

Thus far, discussion has addressed specific information concerning components of the workshop. Student responses have indicated specific preferences; and yet, overall, students in the sample have positive attitudes toward language arts. In fact, interview results indicated that students in the experimental group would follow the existing language arts instruction process designed by Atwell (1987) fairly closely with some modifications.

Specific suggestions are helpful in determining which parts of the process are deemed most important according to students. For instance, several single comments from various children revealed emerging ideas not included in Atwell's (1987) process that may provide teachers with specific ideas for their workshops. This information supports the purpose of this study, which was designed to determine what to maintain, expunge, or add to a language arts program. Some of the suggestions by students include: have weekly quizzes to assess learning or discussions at the end of the workshop when students are more settled, assign reading for homework, incorporate more conferencing, and assign two-three major presentations during the year. Results from this study showed that asking students how they would like to conduct the workshop facilitates instruction because students have choices in deciding how they learn.

In accordance with whole language theory and Atwell's beliefs (1984), some students interviewed acknowledged the inextricable connection between the various components of language arts and the need for "more than just having everybody read and then dismissing

them," even though this was never formally discussed. When asked what he felt was most important, another student responded, "I guess reading because I think reading helps you understand words and it helps you with your spelling. . . and that also helps your writing." This emphasis on language arts as an entire process may help teachers decide how to shape their reading workshops so that the program involves more than just reading.

In conclusion, when asked how the students felt about the readers workshop, most said it was really fun. Fun is a byproduct of variety and involvement, as evidenced by some of the comments. One student claimed, "it was a lot of fun 'cause we did a lot of interesting things." Another said, "I liked it because the reading that we do in class isn't all that fun. All we do is read for 30-40 minutes." Finally, one student said of the whole process, "I think it was a good job and I think we learned a lot from it and I think we all enjoyed it--I did." According to researchers Turner and Alexander (1990), there is a positive correlation between attitude and learning. Therefore, if students say that they had fun, then the syllogism would indicate that a workshop that is fun is one that promotes learning, and may need to be explored.

Chapter V
Summary and Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to determine students' attitudes toward aspects of a reading workshop that is based in whole language theory and combines all the components of language arts. However, the purpose of this study was not to promote Atwell's process as the panacea for language arts instruction simply because a small sample of students found it fun and helpful. The hypothesis stated that students' attitudes would provide information that teachers would be able to use to assist them in planning language arts programs in their classrooms and this study has succeeded in this goal.

Results from this study indicated that students shared similar preferences toward choice, time for reading in school, feedback, discussion, and an overall positive attitude toward the process. Even so, the differences and variety of opinions imply that one exact process strictly followed to may not effectively address all students' interests and needs. Therefore, teachers should consider how to incorporate all the components of language arts by applying whole language principles and recognizing that the components need to be included in some way. For example, discussion was found to be instrumental for sharing ideas and learning. A teacher may discover that using discussions in a manner

other than that of Atwell works best for his/her students that school year.

Time shortage is a factor that seems to plague teachers and researchers alike and is one that will need to be addressed. Asking students the ways in which they feel their time will be most efficiently spent and following through with their suggestions will again give students some choice and will probably contribute to more effective time management and overall learning.

The results of this study raise questions about the findings of Flood and Lapp (1986), who found that 98% of teachers used a basal approach, one that clearly denies choice and individualization according to interests by solely relying on the experts. Selecting a language arts program is a complex process that involves examining current research, exploring teacher testimonials, and, as this study has shown, asking students explicitly. According to some theorists, simply relying on "experts" (eg. textbook editors), is inadequate and contrary to whole language beliefs (Goodman, 1989, p. 208). In fact, I might suggest that the true experts are the students, who are the consumers of the process.

More research is needed to assess students' attitudes toward basal or prescribed programs to determine if choice of reading materials, discussion, and general variety are as important as they were to the students in this study. Future research should also be conducted over a longer period of time to yield more thorough results.

Appendices

Appendix A

READING WORKSHOP DAILY SCHEDULE

MINI-LESSONS (10 MINUTES)

SUSTAINED SILENT READING (20-25 MINUTES)--

INDIVIDUAL CONFERENCES DURING SSR (5-10 MINUTES EACH)

WRITING TIME (5 MINUTES)--optional

Appendix B
RULES FOR READING

1. **You must READ books (not magazines, comics) for the entire time.**
2. **You must bring a book with you to workshop unless you have finished one and need help finding a new book**
3. **You may not talk or disturb your peers--this means no getting up or being excused during the reading time**
4. **You should get comfortable and relax while you read**

Appendix C
DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

Random assignment sample of 11 fifth grade students, 6 boys and 5 girls

1.Gender--whole class

13 boys 10 girls

2. Race (numbers of)
Caucasian
African-American
Asian American
American Indian
Other (Please specify)

3. Socio-economic status--Number of students in class on:
Reduced lunch 0
Free lunch 0

4. Number of students using resource services: (explain)

5. Range of reading level of students:

Appendix D
ATTITUDE SURVEY

A. Please answer the following questions.
1.How many books would you say you read in a month?_____

B. Circle the response that BEST describes how you feel

2. I prefer to choose my own books to read.
strongly agree agree not sure disagree strongly disagree

3. I like it when the teacher talks to me about books that I read.
strongly agree agree not sure disagree strongly disagree

4. I read what the teacher suggests.
strongly agree agree not sure disagree strongly disagree

5. I read when I have free time.
strongly agree agree not sure disagree strongly disagree

6. I think a good reader is someone who reads a lot.
strongly agree agree not sure disagree strongly disagree

7. I like reading some types of books but not others.
strongly agree agree not sure disagree strongly disagree

8. I read at home every day.
strongly agree agree not sure disagree strongly disagree

9. I like to read when I get to choose my own books.
strongly agree agree not sure disagree strongly disagree

10. It helps me to write about the books I read.
strongly agree agree not sure disagree strongly disagree

11. I prefer to select books from the classroom library.
strongly agree agree not sure disagree strongly disagree

12. I like to talk about books that I read.
strongly agree agree not sure disagree strongly disagree

13. I finish the books that I start to read.
strongly agree agree not sure disagree strongly disagree

14. I think I spend too much time reading in school.
strongly agree agree not sure disagree strongly disagree

15. I like it when the teacher writes to me.
strongly agree agree not sure disagree strongly disagree

Appendix E

EXPERIMENTAL GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Opening Statement:

This is the beginning of an interview with participant #_____.

I would like to ask you a couple of questions about the reading workshop to help me with my University project. I will not use your real name in the project, so please feel free to say what you truly feel and think. I would also like to tape record the interview so that I use exactly what you say.

First, based on your experiences, explain how you feel about the reading workshop. Probes: What is it about the workshop that causes you to feel this way? Could you say some more about that? (That's helpful. I'd appreciate it if you could give me more detail.)

If you were the teacher, how would you conduct your reading workshop? (ie. change it, improve it, add or remove something). Possible probes: Are there parts of the workshop you do not find helpful? What do you think are the most important parts of the workshop? What parts do you like? What parts are most helpful?

Take me to your classroom during reading. How effective do you think the workshop is?

Closing Statement:

This is the end of the interview with participant #_____(Turn tape off.) Thank you for your time and help. (Check the tape. Record observations immediately.)

Appendix F
READING SURVEY

Objective: To gain information about what to teach for mini-lessons

Please answer the following questions.
Be as accurate as possible.

1. What genre or genres would you like to learn more about? (Circle your choices)

Realistic Fiction	Fables
Myth/Folklore	Non-fiction
Science Fiction	Biography
Historical Fiction	Mystery
Legend	Poetry

Who are your favorite authors? (list as many as you'd like)

How do you choose which books you'll read? (Be as specific as possible)

Appendix G
SCHEDULE OF MINI-LESSONS

INTRODUCTORY LESSON

Day 1--Conduct a reading survey with sample group(see Appendix F)
Introduction of reading workshop process--plans for the month

WEEK 1: The Process

Day 1--What to talk about when writing--Sample letters to me
(what they like/dislike & why, characters, plot, theme, similarities)
Have students practice writing a letter during writing time
Explain reading log list--record of books (provide handouts/samples)
Day 2--How to choose a good book-discuss present strategies, 5-finger rule, genre, authors they like, suggestions from friends/teachers/librarian
Use *To Asmara* as an example of a difficult book for me and why
Day 3--Discuss dialogues with friends --Sample letters to friends
Have students practice writing a letter during writing time
Generate a list of recommended books and authors and introduce genres as a general category--provide outline for mini-lessons
Day 4--Folklore--write a story together--*How the bumble bee got its stripes*--
Read and discuss sample story first, "How the First Fire Came to Man"

WEEK 2:--Genre-A-Day

Day 1--Historical Fiction--*Brother Eagle, Sister Sky*
Day 2--Non-Fiction--Read parts from *Volcanoes*-- Have students share lists of books they recommend
Day 3--Realistic Fiction/Non-fiction--"Based on a true story" discussion
Day 4--Mystery--Learning groups with mystery stories

WEEK 3: Miscellaneous

Day 1--Author study (student presentation)--Have 2 students work together to share information about an author--bring in examples, find supplementary materials
Day 2--Author study (student presentation)--same as above
Day 3--Media representations (view short on a book, generate list of books on video and how to watch for discrepancies)

WEEK 4: Student Presentations

Day 1--Sequels (generate lists of), have students share ideas--Discuss how different works by the same author are not always sequels; consider trilogies as well (e.g. *Indian in the Cupboard*)
Day 2--Read "Honey I love"-- student to read (with expression)
Day 3--Favorite/Main characters--Talk about the main character in the book they are reading. How do they know?
Day 4--Sharing of ideas day--Give students a chance to select and practice reading something aloud--give them a list of tips for doing so

Appendix H
STUDENT INTRODUCTORY LETTER AND SAMPLES

Dear Participant,

First of all, I would like to thank you for helping me with this project. In this letter I have included what I expect from you AND what you should expect from **me**.

1. Mini-lessons-- We will start each workshop with a mini-lesson. During this time (about 10 minutes) we will discuss a genre, author, or book. This is also a chance for you to share books you've read. The first few mini-lessons will explain the workshop.

2. I expect you to **READ** --you will choose what you want to read, but it should not be too hard or too easy for you. (Remember the 5-finger rule? We'll discuss it.) The book should be something appropriate for school. I will help you select books if you like.

Reading involves--20-25 minutes in school every day
Reading at home is optional (but it's a chance to make up reading time if you are absent from school)

3. Conferences with me once a week--This will be a chance for us to chat about how you're doing in reading. We can set goals together and find strategies to help us become stronger readers.

4. I want you **WRITE a letter to me** at least once a week. You may also write to your friends about books, reading, authors and writing . Your logs will be used to record your feelings, ideas, questions, suggestions, problems etc. (There are some examples of letters on the next page)

I will provide you with a sheet to record the titles and authors of the books you read during our time together. Under the comment section, please write FINISHED by those books you read completely. Write the PAGE NUMBER where you stopped reading for books you don't finish (and it's okay to put down a book you don't like!)

We will talk more about the reading workshop, but this is the general idea. Let me know if you have questions!
Miss Greer

Appendix I

EXAMPLE LETTERS--

(when you writeletters, please use your own words and ideas)

Letters to me:

Dear Miss Greer,

I really like reading *Matilda* **because** it is funny. Roald Dahl is my favorite author **because** he writes about school and things I understand. I am wondering what you think about *My Side of the Mountain*. I am thinking about reading that book next.

John

Dear John,

My Side of the Mountain is a book about surviving in the woods. There is a lot of action in the book. Why don't you start it and see how you feel. By the way, what other books have you read by Roald Dahl? *James and the Giant Peach* is funny, too.

Miss Greer

Dear Miss Greer,

I didn't really like the book I was reading so I picked a new one. It was too long and I didn't understand a lot of the words.

Jane

Dear Jane,

That's fine, thanks for giving me a reason why you changed books! Try using the 5-finger rule when picking out a book. Remember, you pick a page and read it. Put one finger up each time you come to an unfamiliar word. If you do this 5 times on one page, you should choose a new book. Let me know what book you select!

Miss Greer

Letters to friends:

Dear Bobby,

So far, I have read three books since we started the workshop. My favorite is *Caddie Woodlawn* because I love reading historical fiction. You should check it out.

Sue

Dear Sue,

I'm reading a mystery right now. Maybe when I'm done I'll read your book. Thanks for the idea.

Bobby

Appendix J

COMPARISON OF LANGUAGE ARTS INSTRUCTION: EXPERIMENTAL AND CONTROL GROUPS

EXPERIMENTAL GROUP READING WORKSHOP DESCRIPITON (Atwell, 1987)

1. Student-selected reading books
2. Teacher-assisted selection from classroom or school library
3. Documentation: Complete list of books finished and unfinished recorded
4. Follow-up Dialogue journals--letters to teacher required weekly (additional writing and letters to friends are optional)
   Emphasis on literary analysis and feelings about books and reading
5. No students pulled for resource during SSR
6. Reading at home is encouraged
7. Daily teacher or student read aloud and activities
   Mini-lessons on genre, author, reading strategies, book sharing, plot, theme etc.
8. Flexible seating arrangement
9. 30 minutes undisturbed reading--mobility only in case of emergency
10. Weekly teacher conferences to discuss reading progress, feelings about book, read aloud, goal setting
11. Record-keeping of books read by student

CONTROL GROUP READING INSTRUCTION DESCRIPTION

1. Student-selected reading books
2. Teacher-assisted selection from classroom or school library
3. No documentation of books completed
4. Occasional special book reports in a genre area
5. No students pulled for resource during SSR
6. Reading at home is encouraged
7. Daily teacher read-aloud in chapter book
8. Flexible seating arrangement
9. 30 minutes undisturbed reading--though some mobility is permitted
10. Conferences during selection only
11. Record-keeping of books read by student

Figure 1
PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION FOR STUDENT AGREEMENT ON CHOICE

	Experimental		Control	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
	A	B	C	D
1.I prefer to choose my own books to read.	100	100	84	100
2.I like to read when I get to choose my own books.	82	82	66	75
3.I like reading some types of books but not others.	91	82	75	83
4.I read what the teacher suggests.	45	27	66	33

****

Figure 2
PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION FOR STUDENT AGREEMENT ON PROXIMITY

	Experimental		Control	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
	A	B	C	D
1.I prefer to select books from the classroom library.	27	18	33	16

****

Figure 3
PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION FOR STUDENT AGREEMENT ON TIME

	Experimental		Control	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
	A	B	C	D
1. I think I spend too much time reading in school.	18	9	16	8

Figure 4
PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION FOR STUDENT AGREEMENT ON DISCUSSION

	Experimental		Control	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
	A	B	C	D
1.I like it when the teacher talks to me about books that I read. (1)	55	73	50	50
2.I like to talk about books that I read. (2)	55	55	75	83

****

Figure 5
PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION FOR STUDENT AGREEMENT ON WRITING

	Experimental		Control	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
	A	B	C	D
1.It helps me to write about the books I read. (1)	9	36	50	45
2.I like it when the teacher writes to me. (2)	82	82	66	50

Figure 6
PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF STUDENT AGREEMENT ON READING

		Experimental		Control	
		Pre	Post	Pre	Post
		A	B	C	D
1.I read when I have free time.	1	73	91	66	83
2.I think a good reader is someone who reads a lot.	2	82	55	50	50
3.I read at home every day.	3	91	73	83	75
4.I finish the books that I start to read.	4	73	80	66	83

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